

CLIMATE NEWS

From Sheldon Whitehouse, Barbara Boxer, and Jeff Merkley

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Kudzu Heads North as Climate Changes



As the climate warms, the vine that ate the U.S. South is starting to gnaw at parts of the North, too. Kudzu, a three-leafed weed first planted in the U.S. more than 100 years ago for the beauty of its purple blossoms, has been spotted in every county in Georgia, Alabama and North Carolina. It chokes young trees, brings down power lines and infests abandoned homes. Now the plant, which can grow as fast as a foot (30 cm) per day, is creeping northward, wrapping itself around smokestacks in Ohio, overwhelming Illinois backyards and appearing as far north as Ontario, Canada. Climate change is partly to blame creating more habitable zones for this plant as the temperature warms. The invasive plant costs U.S. property owners about \$50 million per year in eradication, according to the Nature Conservancy. Plant physiologist Lewis Ziska, from the USDA's Agricultural Research Service, stated in a recent interview that "the one thing that's kept these invasives in check has always been cold weather," "as the winters warm as a result of a changing climate, that more or less opens up a Pandora's box of where these invasives can show up in the future." (Bloomberg)

General Mills to Demand Suppliers Cut Greenhouse Gases

The maker of Cheerios says climate change isn't just bad for humanity, it's bad for business. General Mills' new policy will require its suppliers take steps to cut greenhouse gas emissions and water usage. The company says that weather conditions such as drought and floods can decrease output of the crops that make up its cereal and other food products. General Mills, which also makes Haagen-Dazs ice cream and Green Giant vegetables, says that nearly two-thirds of its emissions and 99 percent of its water use come from suppliers rather than its own operations. John Church, the company's executive vice president of supply chain operations, did not spell out specific targets for greenhouse gas or water usage cuts, but he did pledge that the company would buy its 10 most frequently used ingredients from sustainable sources by 2020. Those ingredients make up 50 percent of its purchases. General Mills also recently joined BICEP, or Business for Innovative Climate and Energy Policy, a coalition of companies including Starbucks, Nike, and Timberland, advocating for strong climate and clean energy policies and legislation. (CNN Money)

Global Warming Affects Ice Hockey's Future

Ice hockey faces an uncertain future if the greenhouse gas-fueled heating of the planet doesn't slow down, according to a sustainability report released this week by the National Hockey League. "Our game originated on frozen ponds," NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman notes in the report, and "many of our players learned to skate on outdoor rinks. For that magnificent tradition to continue through future generations, we need winter weather and, as a League, we are uniquely positioned to promote that message." The NHL worked with the National Resources Defense Council to develop the steps the NHL can take to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, energy usage, and waste from the more than 1,200 games its 30 teams play each year in the U.S. and Canada. The report highlights that nearly a third of NHL venues currently participate in a demand response program, voluntarily reducing electricity demand enhancing grid stability. (Weather Channel /Toronto Star)

Tropical Fish Causing Trouble as Climate Change Drives Them Toward the Poles

The undersea world is on the move due to climate change. As oceans warm fish and other ocean life are migrating into what used to be cooler waters. Researchers are finding that the migration of tropical fish may be devastating for some regions. Invading tropical species are stripping kelp forests in Japan, Australia, and the eastern Mediterranean and eating sea grass in the northern Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic seaboard. In southern Japan, for example, the arrival of rabbitfish and parrot fish destroyed nearly half of the kelp forests there. The removal of a kelp forest or sea grass bed can have detrimental effects not only on native plants and animals, but also on commercial fisheries. Sea grass beds and kelp forests are known as the sea's nurseries because they are filled with nutrients that feed and protect fish larvae and juveniles. "The faunas are mixing, and nobody can see what the outcome will be," said Ken Heck, a marine scientist at the University of South Alabama in Mobile. But the consequences of that mixing are already trickling up the food chain. (National Geographic) 